

Home for the Holidays

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by Brenda Kleinjan

AS THE HOLIDAYS APPROACH, THE CODY HARTMAN and Kaci Cecil family of rural Brookings, S.D. is preparing to spend its first Christmas in their new home.

Cody, Kaci and their two children – like 34 other families across South Dakota – will be celebrating their first Christmas in new homes built through one of the state’s 14 Habitat for Humanity affiliates.

In all, 343 families have purchased their homes through the Habitat for Humanity program since the organization first established its presence in the state in the early 1990s.

Cody and Kaci’s home was built as part of a Home Builders Blitz build. While other Habitat Blitz Builds – hallmarked by an accelerated construction time frame of about one week – have occurred in the state, this was the first to partner area home building professionals with an affiliate in the endeavor. The Brookings Regional Home Builders Association and the Brookings Area Habitat for Humanity partnered for the project. Twenty area contractors worked on the home.

“It was pretty impressive to see,” said Patty Bacon, executive director for Habitat for Humanity – South Dakota. Habitat for Humanity – South Dakota exists to serve Habitat affiliates through education, resource development and

building of public support. Bacon’s office does not actively engage in builds or pair families to projects, but works to ensure that the state’s 14 affiliates have the support they need.

“The Homebuilders Blitz Build was the first formal partnerships of homebuilders with Habitat,” said Bacon, who was quick to note that many individual homebuilders work with their local Habitat affiliates across the state.

“The work was done in seven days with a lot of rain in there,” said Bacon. “It was really exciting to see that happen.”

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit, Christian housing ministry that works both to eliminate poverty housing around the world and to make adequate housing a matter of conscience and action.

Habitat for Humanity was formed in Americus, Ga., in 1976. In its first 25 years of existence, Habitat completed 100,000 homes. Over the last five years, Habitat has completed more than 100,000 additional homes around the world, building at the rate of completing one home every 24 minutes. The organization’s 200,000th home was completed in Knoxville, Tenn., in August 2005. The dedication of the home represented 1 million people living in Habitat housing worldwide.



Increasingly Energy Efficient...

"Energy efficiency has always been high on our priorities whenever we've been building," said Bacon.

"Habitat has always been cognizant of energy efficiency because we know our homeowners need to have a sustainable home," said Bacon.

The Home Builders Blitz house, like others built by the Brookings affiliate, uses Enercept Structural Insulated Panels. Bacon said the high energy efficient methodology is a win for the program.

"The home was ENERGY STAR® certified," said Dr. Larry Swain, executive director for the Brookings Area Habitat for Humanity.

"We build it to benefit the homeowner, so we want it as energy efficient as possible," said Swain.

The three-bedroom house also included an efficient air-source heat pump with electric back up and a Marathon® water heater.

"We started putting heat pumps in this year because that saves the homeowner another 30 percent on their heating costs," said Swain.

In 2009, the Brookings Area Habitat for Humanity is scheduled to build the state's first LEED-certified Habitat home.

Created by the U.S. Green Building Council, LEED certification provides independent, third-party verification that a building project meets the highest green building and performance measures.

LEED-certified buildings:

- Lower operating costs and increased asset value.
- Reduce waste sent to landfills.
- Conserve energy and water.
- Healthier and safer for occupants.
- Reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions.
- Demonstrate an owner's commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

"A lot of green building philosophy is about energy efficiency," said Bacon. "It makes perfect sense for Habitat to be green builders."

So, what would be on Bacon's wish list for this holiday season?

Since the official purpose of Habitat for Humanity – South Dakota is to seek gifts, grants, resources and support which

Above: The Kaci Cecil and Cody Hartman family – along with children Gage and Aubrianna – will be one of 35 South Dakota families celebrating the holidays in a home constructed through Habitat for Humanity in 2008.

Left: Structural Insulated Panels are lifted into place allowing for maximum energy efficiency and construction speed.



shall be held, administered and disposed of for the benefit of the South Dakota Affiliates of Habitat for Humanity International, meeting those needs is a high priority. She's always on the lookout for entities like Larson Manufacturing and Starmark Cabinets to partner with Habitat.

The Brookings, S.D.-based Larson Manufacturing is a national partner of Habitat for Humanity and donates the doors used in homes throughout the country. Starmark Cabinets, located in Sioux Falls, S.D., is a state partner and provides cabinetry for all the homes in South Dakota.

"I'd really like to dispel the myth that we give our homes away," said Bacon. "We sell our homes to families that are at 30 percent to 50 percent of the median income of the area. They pay a mortgage just like you and I. They're working families. They fill all those service industry jobs we have across the state and work very hard, but don't make a lot of money."

Local Habitat for Humanity affiliates hold the mortgages for the homes, so the new homeowners are paying for their homes through Habitat.

"The affiliates hold the mortgage – they pay us," said Bacon, referring to the local affiliates' relationships with the homeowners. "It's exciting when an affiliate gets to the point where the mortgage payments from the homes they've built are enough to build another house."

"It's also exciting for the homeowners to know their payments are going back into building more homes," Bacon said.

Potential homeowners must put sweat equity into building their home and other homes, go through financial and homeowner education and have good credit. A final consideration is the family's need for the housing.

"We typically build for the family in greatest need," said Bacon.

For more information on Habitat for Humanity in South Dakota, visit Habitatsouthdakota.org. For more information on Habitat Humanity nationally, visit www.habitat.org. For information on Habitat for Humanity's presence in Minnesota, visit www.hfhmn.org/ Minnesota's 34 affiliates have built more than 1,500 houses in Minnesota.